Park Police 'Arrests' Aid CIA Training

6/4/76

By Paul Hodge
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U. S. park policemen have been helping the Central Intelligence Agency train its agents by arresting them in federal parks here and interrogating them to see how they stand up under questioning.

A park police official, who asked not to be identified, said that as many as six park policemen had arrested rookie agents "on numerous occasions . . . in Washington," since January. The policemen took the agents to Park Police headquarters and then "interrogated them, gave them as hard a time as they could" before releasing them.

The agents were never booked or jailed, the Park Police official said, "and there was nothing illegal about it. It was just a training program." He refused to provide further details about the program whose existence has been kept secret from most officials of the Interior Department which oversees the Park Police.

Interior Department director of public affairs, Louis Churchville, confirmed the existence of the agent-training program Wednesday but declined to give many details about it. He did say the program began after last Jan. 14 and may still be going on because "the agreement is still in effect" between the CIA and Interior.

The existence of the CIA training was unknown to most Interior officials, including Gary Everheardt, director of the National Park Service, which controls the Park Police, and Jack Fish, director of National Capital Parks, who directly supervises Park Police, according to informed Interior sources. Neither man would return reporter's calls on the subject.

Until Wednesday when Churchville released a CIA letter confirming the existence of the program, and commented briefly on it, no government officials would discuss it and only one would even confirm its existence. Under Secretary of Interior Kent Frizzell admitted last week "I am cognizant of some training program but I'm not free to comment on it . . . it's classified."

A spokesman for the CIA, Dennis Barron, said "Oh yes, we've had calls about this . . . but the agency has no comment."

The CIA letter, sent to Frizzell on Jan. 14 was made public only after Freedom of Information Act requests were made by the Washington Post

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and the New York Daily News. The letter "formally requests" that Park Police assist the CIA in training agents, as agreed at an informal meeting in December between Frizzell, CIA officials and U.S. Park Police chief Jerry Wells.

A similar type of training program took place last spring with Maryland State Police stopping, then "arresting" and briefly jailing agents of the Department of Defense, Defense Intelligence School, according to Maryland State Police Superintendent Thomas Smith.

Col. Smith said last week the DOD officials visited his office in March, 1975, asking police to simulate arrests of several agents who would be driving near Frederick, Md., on a certain day. "They wanted to see how the agents would react to give them some experience," Col. Smith said.

"But that one time was the first and last request for that sort of thing that has come through this office," Col Smith said. "We've never had any dealings with the CIA . . . unless those guys were the CIA."

While Col. Smith spoke freely of the training arrests his officers made, neither Interior's Frizzell nor Churchville would explain the reason for the secrecy surrounding the CIA-Park Police training program, or why civilian officials who supervise Park Police were apparently kept ignorant of it.

Churchville said he could not reveal details of the program, such as where in Washington the "arrests" took place or what the purpose is. "All I can say is that to my knowledge there were no injuries . . . no visitors were involved and there were no untoward incidents."

Sources in the Interior Department indicated that the purpose of the arrests was to subject young agents to interrogation by genuine police officers to see how they handled themselves and to see whether they stuck to whatever "cover" stories and identities they might have. While the police officers involved all knew the people they were arresting were CIA trainees, the agent apparently were unaware they had been set up.

The CIA has given training to sevral Washington-area police departments in the past.

According to CIA documents released in January under a Freedom of Information Act request, Washington, Arlington, Fairfax, Alexandria and Prince George's County policemen were trained by CIA personnel in surveillance techniques, lock-picking and handling explosives during the 1960s and early 1970s.

It was not clear who initiated those training sessions, but they were designed to help local law enforcement officers "combat the tangible threats posed by radical terrorist groups" according to the CIA documents.

The CIA is prohibited from engaging in domestic law enforcement activities, a prohibition re-emphasized by President Ford last February the White House declined to comment on any aspect of the CIA-Park Poice Training program.

Washington Post Staff Writer Alfred E. Lewis contributed to this report.